

Testimony to the Appropriations Committee In Support of Funding for Early Childhood Programs

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Submitted by Tracey Madden-Hennessey
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Good evening, Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Tracey Madden-Hennessey I am the Associate Director of the YWCA New Britain, a state funded School Readiness Provider in New Britain. I support expanded funding for Early Childhood. This includes completing the establishment of the Office of Early Childhood, addressing the shortage of credentialed early childhood educators, and funding increases to School Readiness and Care 4 Kids Programs.

The need for early childhood programs is particularly acute in cities like New Britain. New Britain is the now the fourth poorest city in the State according to the Connecticut Public Investment Community Index. Information from the Department of Education, Strategic School Profile indicates that the percentage of adults living in New Britain without a high school diploma is 33%. The drop-out rate for New Britain students is 25%, twice the state average. Much research substantiates the long term benefits of early childhood education on young children, particularly those growing up in poverty. Although most New Britain children now have access to one year of early childhood education, most school readiness providers still operate with waiting lists. The children at highest risk are less likely to attend and would most benefit from participation.

In addition, School Readiness rates have not increased since 2006, not keeping pace with the expense associated with high quality early education. Care 4 Kids eligibility has been reduced over that same time, and funds associated with the program cut. Adequate school readiness funds and Care 4 Kids subsidies are necessary for the YWCA to provide the services required.

Other issues related to quality include the inclusion of teachers with early childhood degrees in higher numbers in School Readiness classrooms. We support grandfathering in qualified teachers as they continue to progress towards a degree. There are insufficient numbers of Early Childhood graduates to fill all of those needed by regulation to staff school readiness classrooms across the state. And complete the establishment of the Office of Early Childhood to increase the efficiency with which programs are supported and regulated.

Thank you for your attention.